

PM remarks for the the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands

It is a great honour for me to join you today before this extraordinary gathering of so many brave, gallant individuals, so many veterans and their families, exactly 40 years after British soldiers entered Port Stanley and liberated the Falkland Islands.

If you look at the photographs of our troops raising the Union Flag over Government House, you'll see young men who had just fought their way across a desolate and freezing landscape,

and they're unkempt and unshaven, their camouflage is streaked with mud, and you sense that their stamina – even their legendary stamina, has been tested to the limit, but what strikes you most is how their eyes and their faces are filled with pride in what they have achieved.

I of course have to rely on photographs, yet many of you were actually there.

You were the spearhead of an immense national effort, whereby our country dispatched a Task Force 8,000 miles to the South Atlantic to liberate a British territory from occupation and, even more importantly, to vindicate the principle that the people of the Falkland Islands – like people everywhere – have a right to decide their own future and live peacefully in their own land.

You left behind 255 British service personnel who laid down their lives for that principle, along with three Falkland Islanders.

As we honour their memory, the greatest tribute we can pay them is that ever since the liberation the Falkland Islands have lived and thrived in peace and freedom.

Today, they are home to people of 60 nationalities, providing Britain's gateway to the Antarctic, and vital opportunities for conservation and scientific research, based on a modern partnership founded on that principle of self-determination.

None of this would have happened without the tenacity, courage and fortitude of everyone who served in the Task Force and the thousands of civilians who made it possible.

Now, in honour of your achievements and sacrifice, I would like to ask the Hon Roger Spink and the Hon Leona Roberts of the Falkland Islands Government to present Tom Herring, the Chairman of the South Atlantic Medal Association, with a scroll giving all holders of the South Atlantic Medal the Freedom of the Falkland Islands.